

**(Washington, DC)** Today, Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (D-Miramar) recognized the importance of World AIDS Day in the global effort to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic. According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS), there are now 33.3 million people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide, including 2.5 million children. In the United States, approximately 1.1 million people are living with HIV/AIDS and an estimated 56,300 Americans are newly infected with HIV each year.

As the 22<sup>nd</sup> annual World AIDS Day is observed around the world, HIV/AIDS remains a significant public health challenge. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than one in five HIV-positive individuals are unaware that they are infected, which means that they may be transmitting HIV without knowing it. This year's World AIDS Day theme is "Universal Access and Human Rights," underscoring the critical importance of increasing access to prevention services and treatment and recognizing the rights of HIV/AIDS patients as human rights.

"Every first of December for the past 22 years, we have commemorated World AIDS Day to increase awareness, improve education, combat prejudice, remember those who are no longer with us, and celebrate how far we have come in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. Thanks to the dedication of countless scientists, health care providers, government officials, organizations, and activists, more and more people can live with HIV/AIDS rather than die from it.

"Although HIV/AIDS knows no borders, the disease has taken a particularly devastating toll on my district. My home state of Florida continues to rank among the top-three states in the nation in reported HIV/AIDS cases. Nearly half of these are concentrated in Broward, Miami-Dade, and Orange Counties, with Broward County having the second highest rate of HIV/AIDS in Florida.

"To make matters worse, our nation's state AIDS Drug Assistance Programs (ADAPs) are in crisis. Due to a federal funding shortfall, state budget cuts, and an increase in the number of individuals who rely on state ADAPs for access to HIV-related medications and other vital services, nine states, including Florida, have had to create ADAP waiting lists and cut services. We must ensure that individuals living with HIV/AIDS have reliable access to the care they need and deserve.

“There is, however, hope in the struggle to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. Most recently, the Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis Initiative (iPrEx) released a study suggesting that the risk of HIV/AIDS infection in men may be significantly reduced through adherence to a daily antiretroviral regimen and safe sex practices. I applaud the pioneering work of the researchers involved with the Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis Initiative and look forward to future successful developments in efforts to prevent, reduce, and manage HIV/AIDS.

“On this World AIDS Day, my thoughts and prayers are with those across this nation and around the world who live with HIV/AIDS every day. While we have certainly made great strides in the battle against HIV/AIDS, our work is far from over. As we approach the beginning of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, I stand committed to working with my colleagues to continue protecting the rights of HIV/AIDS patients and increasing access to testing and treatment.”

Congressman Hastings has been a longtime advocate for the HIV/AIDS community, having introduced a resolution to recognize the life and legacy of AIDS activist Pedro Zamora and legislation to increase access to voluntary screening for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STIs). In addition, Hastings continues to support robust funding for the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program, including the HIV/AIDS Treatment Modernization Act, the Minority HIV/AIDS Initiative, the National AIDS Strategy, and state ADAPs.

*Congressman Alcee L. Hastings is Vice Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, a senior member of the House Rules Committee, and Co-Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission.*

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